

Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems for Vehicle Service Building and Other Non-domestic Wastewater

New Rules From the Environmental Protection Agency

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has adopted federal regulations for specific industrial wastewater discharges to non-residential Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (POWTS). These types of wastewater treatment systems are commonly called "septic systems". EPA categorizes POWTS which discharge to the subsurface as Class V injection wells. This rule does not apply to a system where the final disposal of the wastewater is to a holding tank.

EPA promulgated these rules under authority of the federal Safe Drinking Water Act. The regulations are part of the Underground Injection Control (UIC) program which, in Wisconsin, is administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

One part of the regulation specifically applies to buildings that are not serviced by public sewers and are used to maintain or repair motorized vehicles. The regulatory requirements include any facility that does vehicular repair work. Examples of these are automotive service stations, new or used car dealerships, auto body repair shops, muffler shops, radiator repair shops, and fleet operations. Additionally, any business servicing lawn and garden equipment, boat motors, motorized aircraft, farm tractors, bulldozers, or other similar motorized equipment are also affected by EPA's rule.

New Vehicle Service Facilities

Any non-residential facility constructed after April 5, 2000 that maintains or repairs motorized vehicles is not allowed to discharge wastewater from any area where a fluid used, generated or stored during service work to a POWTS. This prohibition also includes existing commercial facilities that had been used for purposes other than maintaining or repairing motorized vehicles, but which now plan to do so. Alternatives to connecting to an onsite system include connecting to a holding tank or connecting to a public sanitary sewer. You may also eliminate the discharge by isolating the service area of a building with a physical barrier or raised floor such that any spilled material in the service area will not reach a floor drain connected to a subsurface system. In plain language, connection of a service-area floor drain, where maintenance or repair of motorized vehicles occurs, to any wastewater plumbing system that discharges into a POWTS employing subsurface discharge, is no longer allowed nationwide.

Existing Vehicle Service Facilities

Motor vehicle service facilities with existing floor drains connected to a POWTS that includes a soil absorption component that were constructed prior to April 5, 2000 will have from five to seven years to come into compliance with this federal rule. Options that may be considered for these systems include sealing shut the floor drains to eliminate any discharge, connecting to a holding tank or connecting to a public sanitary sewer. If these options are not practicable, the service building owner may apply for a Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permit from the DNR. This permit would require compliance with groundwater standards to prevent any harmful pollutants from entering the disposal system.

If the floor drains in the service area currently discharge to a POWTS with a subsurface soil absorption system, the business is required under federal law to register the shop with the DNR. Registration will enable state regulatory officials to provide them with additional information and guidance that EPA is preparing.